

The Adoption Option

by Dr. Jean Garton

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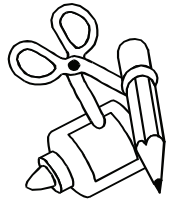
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In a classroom of six-year olds, the teacher was discussing a picture of a family. One of the children featured had a different hair color than did the other family members. A little girl in the class said maybe that was because the boy had been adopted. "I know all about adoptions," she said, "because I was adopted." "What does that mean if you're adopted?" asked a classmate. "It means," said the little girl, "that you grew in your mommy's heart instead of her tummy."

Yet there are whole organizations that exist for the sole purpose of aborting the adoption option. They believe that babies are better dead than with parents who are not theirs by birth.

When the founder of an anti-adoption group was asked how she would counsel a teenage daughter who became pregnant, she said she would counsel her daughter "first to keep the baby, second to have an abortion, third to commit suicide, and only fourth to put the baby up for adoption."

Why all the hostility? In a *National Review* article (6/7/93) Dr. Marvin Olasky suggests three reasons.

1. In order for abortion to be legal and accepted, the unborn child has to be seen as the woman's property.
2. For female autonomy to be affirmed, it must not be acknowledged that it is better for a child to live in a two-parent family than with a single parent.
3. Every happy adoptee is a reminder to aborting mothers of the road not taken.

Adoption may not be a new reproductive technology, but it is a tried and true family-building option. Adoption, all in all, has served women, children, and society well.

- It stems the tide of poverty and misery that can flow from out-of-wedlock births;
- It places children into more stable family structures than they might have with biological or foster parents; and
- It allows childless couples to create families.

As one professional noted, "There are no unwanted children, only unfound parents." (1)

In the United States today there are two million couples seeking to adopt. Unfortunately, there are only 30,000 children available for placement each year. Such numbers result from two factors.

National Adoption Resources/Agencies

Note: Inclusion on this list does not imply Lutherans For Life's endorsement of the particular views and policies of each individual organization. User discretion advised. LFL does not control the content of pages on external sites.

Adoption.Com - <http://www.adoption.com/>

Christian Adopt - www.ilovejesus.com/missions/adopt

Christian Adopt offers resources and information to Christians who are interested in any aspect of adoption, from those who are just beginning to investigate the adoption process, to "veteran" adoptive parents and birth parents, to pastors and Christians involved in pregnancy counseling.

National Council for Adoption

225 North Washington Street • Alexandria, VA 22314-2561
(703) 299-6633

www.ncfa-usa.org • ncfa@adoptioncouncil.org

Well-known adoption advocacy organization; publishes many materials, including *The Adoption Factbook*. Highly recommended monthly newsletter, *National Adoption Reports*.

Adoptive Families of America

42 West 38th Street - Suite 901 • New York, NY 10018

(646) 366-0830

Subscription Customer Service (800) 372-3300

letters@adoptivfam.com • www.adoptivfam.org

Support and advocacy organization for adoptive families. Publishes *Adoptive Families* magazine bimonthly.

Bethany Christian Services

901 Eastern Avenue NE • PO Box 294

Grand Rapids, MI 49503

(616) 459-6273 or (800) BETHANY

www.bethany.org • info@bethany.org

Largest child placement agency in US; 57 offices nationwide. Opportunities for both domestic and international adoption. Contact for agency nearest you.

Children's Home Society of Minnesota

1605 Eustis Street • St. Paul, MN 55108

(651) 646-6393 • www.chsm.com • intake@chsm.com

Works in U.S. and internationally; some special needs and waiting children.

Holt International Children's Services

P.O. Box 2880 • Eugene, OR 97402

(541) 687-2202

www.holtintl.org • info@holtinternational.org

Large Christian international agency, works in all 50 states; publishes *HI Families* magazine.

Children Awaiting Parents, Inc. (CAP)

595 Blossom Road - Suite 306 • Rochester, NY 14610

(585) 232-5110 • (888) 835-8802

www.capbook.org • info@capbook.org

Publishes the CAP Book; a photo listing of waiting U.S. children. On-line with *Faces of Adoption*.

International Concerns Committee for Children, Inc.

911 Cypress Drive • Boulder, CO 80303

(303) 494-8333 • www.fortnet.org/ICC/ • icc@boulder.net

Has monthly photo listing of children waiting for adoption from overseas. Not an agency but will refer to agencies that can help place the children who are listed.

National Adoption Center

1500 Walnut Street - Suite 701 • Philadelphia, PA 19102

(215) 735-9988 or (800) TO-ADOPT

www.adopt.org/adopt • nac@adopt.org

National listings of agencies and adoption exchanges; good resource for special needs and older children.

In Congress, "The Adoption Awareness Act" has been introduced. Its key proposals are to make grants available to national pro-life organizations to train their staff in adoption counseling; and to require adoption counseling training for staff in certain federally funded clinics.

December was declared National Adoption Month, and in December of 1999, CBS hosted a television special on adoption.

The Post Office is currently designing a postage stamp that will honor adoption.

Incentives and bonuses have led to an unprecedented increase in the adoption of children from the foster care system.

An independent project, The Embryo Adoption Program, encourages people to adopt the "leftovers" from in vitro fertilization. It is estimated that 150,000 embryos are frozen in laboratories and research centers. They have been called "Snowflake Babies" because, like snowflakes, each embryo is tiny, unique, fragile, and frozen.

Adoption can be an enormously unselfish gift to a baby, not only as a way to give a child a secure, loving, stable family but to give that child the most precious gift of all – life.

Adoption isn't easy. It is one of the most complex emotional arrangements in which an individual can be involved. Yet, of the other options – aborting the child or raising the child as a single parent – adoption is the most child-centered. It is a healthy, realistic, and sensible choice for all the parties involved.

(1) Spokesperson for the National Adoption Center in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

(2) Arkansas Democrat-Gazette, September 21, 1999

(3) "Growing Up Adopted: A Portrait of Adolescents & Their Families" by the Search Institute of Minneapolis, Minnesota

(4) Exodus 1:22 - Exodus 2:10

(5) Compiled by LDS Social Services in Salt Lake City, UT, and NCFCA, *Unmarried Parents Today*, Vol. XII, No. 2

(6) Dr. Jacqueline Horner Plumez, author of *Successful Adoption*

(7) Psychologist L. DiAnne Borders, University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

Helping Families in Need - The Adoption Option was presented by Dr. Jean Garton at The World Congress of Families II, November 14-17, 1999, in Geneva, Switzerland. Reprinted by permission.

First, the number of infertile couples in the U.S. exceeds one million, and even recent advances in reproductive technology can only help one in five. Secondly, America's annual abortion rate of 1.3 million drastically reduces the number of children available for adoption.

The desperation of childless couples is evident in ads which appear daily in newspapers across the country. The following are actual placements. ⁽²⁾

HELP! Our dream is of a small voice calling mommy and daddy. We are a warm, compassionate, financially secure, and loving couple. Call us at _____.

HUGS, KISSES, & DREAMS await your newborn. Your child will be part of a warm, tender, and happy home. We are a loving and happily married couple who love sports and enjoy travel. Call Ariene and Jim at _____.

INFANT ADOPTION! We are two loving people waiting to love a third. We are dreaming of 2 a.m. feedings and buggy rides through the park. Your expenses paid. Call Sally and Jeff at _____.

Americans have increasingly been turning to other countries for children, with the largest numbers now coming from Asia, in particular Korea, Vietnam, and China. The obvious difference in appearance that results from transracial adoption was reflected in a true story told by the mother of two young sons.

One day when they were in a store, a stranger asked if the boys were friends rather than brothers, noting that they didn't look at all alike. The child "of color" said, "That's because I'm adopted. That's when you have the same family but not the same face."

The findings from a four-year, federally funded, largest ever adoption study showed positive family dynamics across all types of adoptions whether transracial or same-race. Overall the children adopted from Asia have the most positive results in a very positive picture. ⁽³⁾

Especially significant is that—given the large number of minority children and babies needing to be adopted—transracially adopted adolescents are closest of all to their adoptive parents.

Adoption in the contemporary context reflects very little of its history in American culture or in its ancient past. It is so thoroughly bureaucratized it is easy to assume that adoption is a product of the 20th century. The history of adoption, however, begins much earlier.

One of the first written accounts dates back 4000 years to the Code of Hammurabi. The Egyptians, Greeks, and Romans recognized and legalized adoption. For instance, to ensure the continuation of his power, Julius Caesar adopted his nephew Octavian, who was later known as Caesar Augustus, **“from whom there went out a decree that all the world should be taxed.”** (Luke 2:1-7)

However, the primary interest in adoption for earlier societies was to secure the continuation of power rather than serve the best interests of the child. Consistent with their belief that children were property, Greeks and Romans treated children as secondary parties to the adoption contract.

The Bible provides the first view of adoption as a covenant rather than a contract. Ancient Hebrews believed that contracts governed the exchange of property but that the formation of personal relationships was by a covenant, a sacred promise that was the foundation of kinship and family.

The story of Moses in the Old Testament is a classic account of the adoption covenant. When his mother feared that Moses would be killed, she placed him in a reed basket on the Nile River. He was found by the Pharaoh's daughter who rescued him and, the Bible says, Moses “became her son.”

Moses' life and well-being were secured by the sacrifice of two women: his mother and Pharaoh's daughter. Their adoption covenant was a promise which ensured that Moses' life would be spared and nurtured. ⁽⁴⁾

For Christians, adoption is generally viewed as an honorable institution. It is even more significant in a spiritual sense for those who are not part of the “chosen people” of the Old Testament – not of the lineage of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob – in that they become members of God's family by adoption through belief in God's Son as Savior.

Because of misconceptions about adoption, many more girls and women today are either aborting their babies or raising them as single parents. Over 1 million teenagers in America become pregnant each year. Over 40% of them choose abortion. Only 2-3% place their child for adoption.

There are over 4,000 crisis pregnancy centers that offer supportive services. Yet all together they report that only 2% of their clients choose to place their child for adoption. Planned Parenthood, on the other hand, claims that 3% of their clients choose adoption. What's wrong with this picture?

The truth is that adoption is rarely presented as an option. Yet society does itself and these young women no favor when the option of adoption is not offered and encouraged.



Here the two are together - the closest of sisters. Ann Chi has been given the added American name of Carissa, and Hy Min the name Claire.



These are the other children in the family. Their brothers are triplets aged 19, and their sister is 14. I am the proud grandmother of all six of them!



When a young woman named Mary gave birth to her first child, her husband was on military duty so she spent the first weeks after the child's birth at her parents' home. One day Mary mentioned to her mother that she was surprised that her baby's hair was reddish when both she and her husband were blond. “Well, remember,” said her mother, “that your dad's hair was once red.” “But, mom,” said Mary, “that wouldn't make any difference because I'm adopted.” With a surprised smile her mother said, “I always forget.” (A true story!)

Finding oneself with an unexpected, unwanted pregnancy (especially when young or single) can be one of the most difficult moments she will ever face. Because abortion represents a relatively swift and supposedly “simple” resolution to an unplanned pregnancy, carrying a baby through birth and completing an adoption plan stands as an act of extraordinary courage and love. Perhaps no other gesture expresses motherhood in its most purely loving form.

The miracle of adoption is about the pain, resolution, and growth that comes when adoptive couples accept their infertility and face their fears about adoption *and* when a young girl and her family or a single woman face the issues of an untimely pregnancy.

Attempts to encourage adoption are currently being made in the United States in a variety of ways.



This is Hye Min adopted from an orphanage in Korea. Her right arm is missing from the shoulder down.



She was never able to crawl and tended to fall on her face a lot when she was first learning to walk, but now she skips and runs and climbs.



Here she has climbed up into a rocker. It has been suggested that she lost her arm during a failed abortion.

Adoption serves all four parties well – the child, the biological mother, the adopting parents, *and* society – because the evidence is overwhelming as to the negative effects experienced by single mothers and their children.

Unmarried mothers who keep their children, when compared to those who place them for adoption, are more likely:

- to have serious employment problems;
- to require public assistance;
- to live in poverty;
- to have children with health problems;
- to have children with serious behavior problems;
- to have infants who die from injuries;
- to repeat an out-of-wedlock pregnancy;
- to have children who have out-of-wedlock pregnancies;
- to be school dropouts; ⁽⁶⁾
- to remain unmarried. ⁽⁶⁾

By way of contrast, unmarried mothers who make an adoption plan for their children are more likely:

- to finish school;
- to obtain a higher education;
- to escape living in poverty;
- to not require public assistance;
- to delay marriage longer;
- to marry eventually;
- to be employed 12 months after the birth;
- to avoid a second out-of-wedlock pregnancy.

Outcomes for those who choose adoption are often similar to those cited by women who choose abortion.

- Each can pursue earlier goals and plans.
- Each can live independently.
- Neither will have to parent prematurely.
- Each will be free of the financial burdens of parenting.
- Each will avoid being forced into a hasty marriage.
- If young, each can resume their youthful lifestyle.

Teenagers, in particular, who bear and keep children outside of marriage are statistically more likely to remain uneducated, unemployed, and underprivileged. When compared with the general population, children placed with adoptive couples, rather than remaining with unmarried young mothers, fare much better economically and have more stable lives. ⁽⁶⁾

Language has played a negative role in the adoption discussion. It is difficult for a young woman to see adoption as a positive solution when terms are used such as “giving up” or “giving away” her child instead of “making an adoption plan.”

In adoption what a mother “gives up” are parenting responsibilities which she is unable to provide her child. That is not to ignore the physical or emotional pain involved in entrusting a child to an adopting couple. On the contrary, it means that the biological mother will be assuming immediate pain in order to spare her child the greater pain that lies ahead. Adoption is looking after the interests of the child first, while providing specialized, sensitive counseling to help the hurting mother.

It is a myth that adopted children do not do as well in life as do children living with a biological parent. A recent study of 700 teenagers who had been adopted as infants found them to be every bit as well-adjusted, socially skilled, and intellectually able as their non-adopted peers.⁽⁷⁾

Children adopted at a later age, after years in foster care, appear to have more behavioral and emotional problems and to have experienced more physical abuse. Elizabeth Bartholet of Harvard University, an adoption law expert says, “It’s abuse that hurts kids, not adoption.”

U.S. Senator, Mary Landrieu of Louisiana, tells of her husband’s adoption from an orphanage in Ireland when he was five. He had a brother whom he recently met who was not adopted into a family. They are now both in their fifties. The Senator’s husband is confident, successful, and fulfilled. His brother is none of those and continues to be adrift. Is that just a coincidence?

Adoption is part of my own family history. My father was born into an extremely poor, immigrant family with an alcoholic father. Upon his mother’s death, his older siblings were placed with relatives. He and his brother were placed in an orphanage.

After a short time he was adopted and eventually enjoyed not only a long career as a high official in the New York City Police Department but a happy 65-year long marriage to my mother. His non-adopted brother became a many-times-divorced, frequently fired bartender. Is that just a coincidence?

Adoption is currently playing a part in my daughter’s family. After having four biological children, she and her husband adopted an 18-month old little girl from Taiwan with severe facial/cranial disfigurements. A few years later, they adopted an 11-month old little girl from Korea who was born without a right arm.

Those who think it is harder to love an adopted child than a biological child couldn’t be more wrong. I know that first hand as the grandmother of those two adopted little girls. Others know it, too.



This is Ann Chi adopted from an orphanage in Taiwan. She was born three months early and has a genetic disease called Treacher-Collins Syndrome. She has no lower chin or cheek bones. Her ears are misshapen and she wears hearing aids. Here she is being fed through a nose tube.



Here is Ann Chi surrounded by toys she received when she was first hospitalized. Many surgeries have been needed since she first arrived in the United States. In this picture, the toys are covering the tracheotomy tube in her throat.